

Recognizing China's growing geopolitical and economic influence and the need to build greater mutual understanding between our two countries, my colleague, Rick Larsen (D-WA), and I created the US - China Working Group in 2005 to educate and inform Members and their staffs on US-China relations. We convene working group sessions monthly with China experts from government, academia, and international organizations.

Today, we were honored to have Cardinal Theodore E. McCarrick, former head of the Archdiocese of Washington, to speak about the current situation with the Catholic Church in China. Cardinal McCarrick provided us with some fascinating insights regarding the community of faith within China. He says that there are over 100 million Chinese that belong to a religion today. The Chinese government officially recognizes five religions: Confucianism, Taoism, Islam, Christianity, and Catholicism. Many of these churches and their members are officially registered with the central government. However, underground churches and observers exist in China as well. For example, the Cardinal says that while there are about 10 million registered Catholics in China, there are between 15 and 20 million underground members of the Church. He pointed to a gap between the registered and underground churches as being a difficult problem for both the Chinese and the Vatican to manage.

Cardinal McCarrick also discussed the challenges faced by the Vatican because there are no official diplomatic ties between the Holy City and Beijing. He noted that the Vatican is willing to accept a "One China" policy but says that Beijing's desires for the Vatican to sever ties with Taiwan would result in a "No China" policy because of the lack of formal ties with Beijing. He says that the recent appointments of three Bishops without Vatican approval were not helpful to solving the problems of the Catholic Church in China. However, the Cardinal mentioned that the an "Easter Letter" addressed from the Pope to Beijing is forthcoming and he is hopeful that this will be a step forward in building better mutual understanding between the Catholic Church and the Chinese leadership.

I found this working group session particularly constructive. Cardinal McCarrick brought important insights about the religious community within China to the Hill. I look forward to working in Congress to bring more religious freedom to the Chinese people.